

REMARKS

In response to the Office Action mailed on June 5, 2003, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration. To further the prosecution of this application, each of the issues raised in the Office Action is addressed herein.

Claims 1-6, 8-27, 29-45, and 47-54 presently are pending in this application, of which claims 1, 24, 32, 33, 44, 45, 47 and 51 are independent claims. By this Amendment, claims 1, 5, 8, 12, 13, 19, 24, 29, 30, 32, 33, 44 and 45 have been amended, and claims 7, 28 and 46 have been cancelled. The application as now presented is believed to be in allowable condition.

A. Allowed Claims/Allowable Subject Matter

Applicants note with appreciation that on page 4 of the Office Action, claims 47-54 are allowed, and claims 7-23 and 28-43 are objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but would be allowable if rewritten in independent form to include all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims.

Accordingly, while not acceding to the propriety of any claim rejections over prior art set forth in the Office Action, Applicants have rewritten some claims and canceled others solely to accept the subject matter deemed allowable by the Examiner, so as to expedite the prosecution of this application towards allowance.

For example, independent claim 1 has been rewritten to include the subject matter of dependent claim 7, which was indicated as allowable; thus, claim 1 now is in condition for allowance. Claim 7 has been canceled. Claims 2-6 and 8-23 depend from claim 1, and are allowable based at least upon their dependency. Claims 8, 12 and 13 have been amended to depend directly from claim 1 in light of the cancellation of claim 7, and claims 5 and 19 have been amended to correct minor grammatical errors.

Additionally, independent claim 24 has been rewritten to include the subject matter of dependent claim 28, which was indicated as allowable; thus, claim 24 now is in condition for allowance. Claim 28 has been canceled. Claims 25-27 and 29-31 depend from claim 24, and are allowable based at least upon their dependency. Claims 29 and 30 have been amended to depend directly from claim 24 in light of the cancellation of claim 28.

Claims 32 and 33, which were indicated as allowable, have been rewritten to include the subject matter of their base claim 24; thus, claims 32 and 33 now are in condition for allowance. Claims 34-43 depend from claim 33 and are allowable based at least upon their dependency.

Each of independent claims 44 and 45 has been rewritten to include the subject matter of former claim 7 which, as discussed above, was indicated as allowable. Since each of claims 44 and 45 recites the subject matter of claim 1 as pending prior to the amendments to claim 1 herein, plus additional subject matter, it is respectfully believed that the addition of the subject matter of former claim 7 to these claims places these claims in condition for allowance.

Claim 46 has been canceled without prejudice or disclaimer as to the subject matter underlying this claim.

In view of the foregoing, it is respectfully believed that all of the claims now are in condition for allowance.

B. Claim Rejections

On page 2 of the Office Action, claims 1-4 and 24-26 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by McDermott. (U.S. Patent No. 5,161,879). Claim 46 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. §102(b) as allegedly being anticipated by Robbins (U.S. Patent No. 4,704,660). On page 3 of the Office Action, claims 5, 6, 27, 44 and 45 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as allegedly being obvious over McDermott in view of Robbins. These rejections are rendered moot by the amendments herein, which were made solely to expedite prosecution of this application toward allowance by accepting subject matter deemed allowable by the Examiner. Applicants do not necessarily concede that the foregoing rejections are proper, and reserve the right to file one or more related applications directed to the subject matter of the claims prior to the amendments herein.

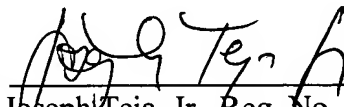
CONCLUSION

In view of the foregoing amendments and remarks, this application should now be in condition for allowance. A notice to this effect is respectfully requested. If the Examiner believes, after this amendment, that the application is not in condition for allowance, the

Examiner is requested to call the Applicants' attorney at the telephone number listed below to discuss any outstanding issues relating to the allowability of the application.

If this response is not considered timely filed and if a request for an extension of time is otherwise absent, Applicants hereby request any necessary extension of time. If there is a fee occasioned by this response, including an extension fee, that is not covered by an enclosed check, please charge any deficiency to Deposit Account No. 50/2762.

Respectfully submitted,
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Docket No. C01104/70091
Date: September 4, 2003
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